

VZCZCXYZ0006
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHDM #0419/01 1270614
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 070614Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3414
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 6775
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 4504
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 3124
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7648
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1722
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5058
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 1265
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCPA//
INFO RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA 7389

UNCLAS DAMASCUS 000419

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: Asad, Syria/Palestinians, Winograd Report, Iraq, Lebanon
(5/1-2)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers on May 2 featured President Asad's visit to Der Ezzor province on May 1 to inspect development projects. He addressed a crowd of citizens and officials, saying that "this time the enemies are playing the card of discord among sects in the region." He added that what is happening now is "a conflict between the possibilities for victory and the failure of the US project in the region," adding that "the results so far are not in favor of this project." He said that "to the east there is the resistance in Iraq, to the west there is the resistance in Lebanon and to the south there is the resistance of the Palestinian people, and we, in Syria, are not in the middle; we are at the heart of all these events." "Syria, the Arab region and the Middle East are going through a dangerous period. Destructive colonial projects are seeking to divide and reshape our region," Asad said. "Now, we see these projects failing, particularly that of the Greater Middle East.... Nevertheless we must not underestimate our enemies, who are playing their last hand, that of sedition and division.... Every Syrian citizen supports the Iraqi people who are resisting the American occupation," Asad said.

Papers on May 2 reported Minister of Information Bilal's meeting on May 1 with Palestinian Information Minister Mostafa Barghouthi on the sidelines of "the International Conference of the Islamic and Arab Media to Support the Palestinian People." The ministers discussed the possibility of coordination between Syrian and Palestinian ministries of information to convey the true image on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Palestinian Information Minister Barghouthi hailed Syrian positions, which support the struggle of Palestinians in the face of the Israeli occupation. Later, Minister Bilal held a meeting with a delegation from Hizbollah and directors of a number of Lebanese media institutions, in which they conferred on aspects of cooperation on political programs. During the meeting, Minister Bilal stressed the importance of boosting and developing cooperation between Syrian and Lebanese media and exchanging experiences to enhance media performance in both countries.

End of summary.

¶2. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad inspects developmental projects in Der Ezzor

province and addresses masses: A powerful state has no existence without strong people.... There is no fear for the future of a homeland that possesses people like the great Syrian Arab people" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/1)

"'The 3rd International Conference of Arab and Islamic Media to Support the Palestinian People' was inaugurated in Damascus. VP Shara: The deliberate confusion between resistance and terrorism secures political cover for terrorism and contributes to strengthening it worldwide. Information Minister Bilal: Syria stands with its face to the wind. Palestinian Minister of Information Barghouthi: We will not accept partial and transitional solutions" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/1)

"Information Minister Bilal meets Palestinian Information Minister Barghouthi. Bilal: Syria wants to support steadfastness of the Palestinian people" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/2)

"FM Mouallem meets a German parliamentary delegation and reiterates the importance of Europe's role in pushing peace process forward" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/1)

"UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon: I look forward to continuing contacts and joint efforts with Syria on Middle East peace" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/1)

"Syria and UNHCR ink agreement on offering medical aid to Iraqi refugees in Syria" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/1)

"Winograd rebukes the Israeli government and army leaders. The White House hastens to save Olmert" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/1)

"Bloody days continue in Iraq. 50 countries announce participation in the Iraq's Neighboring Countries Conference in Sharm al-Sheikh" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/2)

"Pelosi signs the bill on withdrawal from Iraq and Bush uses the veto" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/2)

"General Michel Aoun hints that the opposition might turn into resistance and calls for early election right away. Aoun: Lebanon will not accept orders from foreign embassies on presidential elections" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 5/2)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"What's Next?"

Ghazi al-Dada, a columnist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (5/1): "Eliyahu Winograd, Chairman of the investigation commission on the Israeli war on Lebanon, read out the details of the awaited report.... 'Olmert is responsible for the utter failure to assess the situation, manage the war, and clearly and carefully set out its objectives. Grave mistakes were made.' This is how Winograd saw the reasons and the circumstances of the defeat. In his reaction, Olmert promised to 'draw conclusions and correct the mistakes.' 'Most likely, drawing the conclusions and correcting the mistakes will be done through some military adventure or new crimes the politically shaken Olmert will commit against Palestinians. One can feel this from his statement that he 'does not want escalation with Palestinians but he might be forced to do this.' It is as if he is justifying in advance the crimes he is planning to commit, crimes for which Israel always finds excuses. Some informed circles have indeed said that Olmert, under the pressure of the Winograd Commission, might find himself strongly pushed to engage in some adventure, perhaps to change the mood of the Israeli public and divert its attention from the report's repercussions.

"But what's next? Regardless of the repercussions of Winograd's interim report, or even his final report in July, the impact will remain confined to the domestic Israeli scene. The report will change nothing of Israel's intrinsic criminal nature, regardless of

who is ruling Israel. Israel as a whole will remain a big gang doing only what gangs do....

"But perhaps the only positive point for the Arabs in the Winograd Commission's report is that the Israeli defeat in the war on Lebanon will be officially documented, providing tangible and concrete evidence that the legendary image that surrounded the Israeli army for decades has been smashed and that handling Israel from a position of power and equality is not impossible."

"Rush in the Opposite Direction"

Ali Qasim, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (5/1): "Former CIA Director George Tenet stepped up his accusations against the US Administration over the war on Iraq....

"Now that the war on Iraq has proven to be a miserable failure, it is natural for US officials to trade accusations and try to distance themselves from the war....

"Many of the US officials who participated in preparations for the war or who fabricated lies were hoping for an easy and quick victory so that they could then rush to attribute the success to their ideas, contributions, or initiatives. But as the scope of the expected defeat in Iraq becomes clear and the signs of its disastrous consequences begin to emerge, we will soon see a rush in the opposite direction, toward shirking responsibility and denying

any role for this official or that in the war....

"The noose is getting tighter around President Bush and Vice President Cheney.... The president might find himself forced to abandon his deputy...."

"Pending US decision"

Izz-al-Din Darwish, a columnist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (5/1): "The US administration, which planned the war on Iraq, fabricated its pretexts, and then launched it, still insists on underestimating the minds of people through its allegation that Iraqi democracy is proceeding in the right correction, that it deserves such Iraqi sacrifices and that victory is coming!

"What is this talk which even insane persons do not accept? It is worth mentioning in this regard that the powers that be in the White House, which have misled the US administration and President Bush in particular, have from the beginning held Syria responsible for what is happening in Iraq. This is also talk that even insane persons do not accept.

"The commander of the US forces in Iraq deserves thanks because he was compelled to 'spill the beans' when he praised Syrian efforts in controlling the border with Iraq. This is considered the first praise of this caliber by the Pentagon for Syria since the start of the Bush era, although it is not clear whether a clear change has occurred in the position of the US administration and its outlook on the war on Iraq and the outcomes of that war.

What is certain about the Iraqi topic from beginning to end is that the administration of the neoconservatives has done its dastardly deed in Iraq and that Iraq is the major loser, followed by Syria, which has hosted without prior warning or preparation over 1.5 million Iraqi refugees--something that big powers with their huge resources cannot handle. And yet there has been no complaint from Syria in this regard, which it considers a duty toward its Iraqi brethren and a reminder to the Americans of the heavy burden it has shouldered...."

"The Real Source of Threat"

Muhammad Khayr al-Jammali, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (5/1): "US Vice President Dick Cheney said that Democrats do not appreciate the real threat the United States is facing.... This is a new lie to be added to the lies of the Iraq war...."

"What threat is Cheney talking about, when all justifications and excuses for the war have collapsed and proven to be nothing more than a system of lies promoted in accordance with a carefully thought out plan whose only aim was to unleash the policy of force and implement the neoconservatives' strategy of imposing hegemony and control on the world, beginning with the strategically located and oil-rich Middle East?

"This new lie will be short-lived, as the majority of the American people now realize that the actual threat to their country today lies in the policy that led the United States to a position of conflict and contradiction with the whole world and pushed it towards a war with very heavy losses on the moral and material levels..."

"Realism and Flexibility, Concepts and Falsifications"

Akram Makkinna, a political analyst in government-owned Al-Ba'th, wrote (5/1): "There are some in the Arab arena calling for abandonment of some Arab rights under pretexts like 'realism' and 'the need to bend to the storm'...."

"The need to adjust to international changes does not mean that we must disregard or not work for our national and pan-Arab principles. Nor does it mean that we take the easy option of surrender, full subservience, and abandonment of independent decisions.... Political rationalism does not mean relinquishing rights and principles...."

"It is surprising that some are calling for lowering the ceiling of the Arab peace plan that the Riyadh summit reaffirmed, the plan that represents the minimum Arab rights. Promoting the realism of concessions is as dangerous as the Western-Zionist plans that target the Arab nation's identity, land, and resources. It is natural to confront such calls, especially after the Arab resistance in Iraq, Palestine, and Lebanon proved that the road to regaining the rights is clear and unambiguous."

Corbin